

# Ludological research traditions in the Institute of Applied Linguistics at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań<sup>1</sup>

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This paper aims to introduce briefly the basic assumptions of ludology as an academic discipline dealing with games research (including educational linguistic and communicational games in teaching foreign languages) and to present the achievements of the *Games Research Association of Poland* being the first ludological association in Poland, and closely cooperating with the Institute of Applied Linguistics at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. The paper also summarises that cooperation and outlines the traditions of ludological research in glottodidactics and intercultural communication in the institute resulting in the recent foundation of the *Center for Ludological Studies in Glottodidactics and Intercultural Communication* and the foundation of the association's official journal "Homo Ludens".

## The origin of ludology

The term *ludology* is a neologism – a hybrid resulting from the combination of two words, one derived from the Latin word *ludus* (*ludere*) – 'to play' – which was used in ancient Rome to cover the entire, large area of games and playing, and the other Greek word *logos* – among numerous other meanings referring to reason and science and in the contemporary form of '-logy' serving to coin names of academic disciplines. At the same time another term existed in Latin – *iocus* (*iocari*) – however it referred to the much narrower sphere of jokes and mischief. Yet, surprisingly, it is the latter that with time expanded its meaning to 'play' and 'to play' and was transferred to Romance languages and transformed into the contemporary *jeu* (*jouer*) in French, *giuoco* (*giocare*) in Italian, *juego* (*jugar*) in Spanish, *jogo* (*jogar*) in Portuguese and *joc* (*juca*) in Romanian (cf. Siek-Piskozub 1995:16). Incidentally, many European languages do not distinguish between 'play' and 'game', thus, there is one word – *Spiel* – for both in German, *spel* in Dutch, *igra* in Russian and – as mentioned above – *jeu* in French. Moreover, even if there are two separate words like in English or Polish

1 The present text is an updated version of a paper read at an international academic conference entitled "Aktuelle Probleme der Angewandten Linguistik. Interkulturalität als Schlüsselkompetenz für Fremdsprachenlehrer, Übersetzer und Mediatoren" organised in 2009 in Obrzycko, Poland (published as: Surdyk 2011).

– *zabawa* (play) and *gra* (game) – their semantic fields are not always identical. Their meanings often overlap even within the same language causing misunderstandings among researchers within a single language, let alone across languages. Therefore, in the literature of cultural studies, psychology, sociology or pedagogy both terms coexist and very often are used interchangeably without defining either, in spite of numerous attempts from the perspectives of multiple disciplines. The opponents of the term ‘ludology’ for the discipline researching games postulate a purely Greek one – ‘paidology’ (Gr. *paidiá* – game, play) – as more correct. However, in this case it would be difficult to distinguish it from the already existing discipline dealing with the study of the nature of children (Gr. *paideia* – child-rearing, education). This is most probably one of the main reasons why, as will be shown below, it is the former term not the latter which has been widely accepted as the name of the discipline. Another, but rather peripheral, reason for the choice of the Latin element could be the official English name of one of the most popular, classic board games – *ludo* (obviously, of Latin origin), based on *Pachisi* that originated in ancient India (known in German as *Mensch ärgere Dich nicht* [Eng. ‘Do not get angry’, literally: ‘Do not get angry, man’ or ‘Do not get angry, buddy’] and adequately in many European countries) and hence the obvious connotation with games, at least for the speakers of English.

The famous Dutch historian and cultural-researcher Johan Huizinga in his classic work “Homo Ludens. A Study of the Play Element in Culture” (1938) coined the title term to be complimentary to *homo faber* after the original *homo sapiens* had turned out to be not complete enough to describe humanity. Huizinga justified his invention, explaining that *homo faber* was even less accurate than *homo sapiens* as many animals are also *faber*, and what refers to creativity refers also to play. He claimed that human culture is created and develops in play and as play. The very term *ludology*, in turn, which, as might be supposed, describes the science of games and play research<sup>2</sup>, was first used in the context of research into computer games/videogames (or broadly speaking digital games) only. Indeed, it was used by Gonzalo Frasca (1999) with the intention “to describe a yet nonexistent discipline that would focus on the study of game in general and videogames in particular” (Frasca 2003:2). However, the term had been used as early as in 1982, albeit rarely and with a different meaning. Finally, the term *ludologist* was first encountered in 2001 at the DAC<sup>3</sup> conference held at

Brown University and was applied to Markku Eskelinen, Jesper Juul, Gonzalo Frasca and Espen Aarseth, though it had never been used by the last one in any of his writings. Apart from that, the term has been applied to the crew of the *Game studies* journal composed mainly of the same people mentioned above. Other game researchers such as Aki Järvinen<sup>4</sup> also define themselves as ludologists. Besides, the word *ludologist* has been popularised by the research weblogs “The Ludologist” by Juul and “Ludology.org” and “Ludologia.org” (in Spanish) by Frasca (both closed in 2010). Among other eminent, contemporary games researchers one should also mention Henry Jenkins (American media-researcher) and Lars Konzack (Danish video games and role-playing games researcher) running his academic blog “Ludologica”<sup>5</sup>. In recent decades numerous associations dealing with games research have been founded across the world (cf. Surdyk 2009), and in Poland the *Polskie Towarzystwo Badania Gier* (cf. Surdyk 2007), so far being the first and only academic ludological association in the country.

However, it would be erroneous and naive to claim that games research was born in 1999 or 1982, as Howard Edward Palmer, as early as in 1921 (so sooner than the fathers or even grandfathers of the contemporary ludologists were born), took up the subject of the academic research of games and their use in the educational context. Even sooner, because at the beginning of 20th century, in a much broader cultural context, Steward Culin (1907) wrote a comprehensive catalog of gaming implements and games from the Native American tribes north of Mexico. Johan Huizinga (1985 [1938]) and Roger Caillois (1997 [1958]), alternatively, explored the importance of games and play as a basic human activity that helps define culture and most often these two researchers are perceived to be the precursors of today’s ludology. In Poland among the earliest game researchers the theoretical establishments of Florian Znaniecki (1974 [1934]) and Wincenty Okoń (1995 [1987]) should be mentioned. The beginning of the so called ‘video games revolution’ and academic interest of these games took place in the early 1980s.

Undoubtedly digital games, as the most dynamically developing and especially popular among younger participants of culture<sup>6</sup>, are the largest and significant group of games that are the subject of ludologist research – yet one should not forget that they are not the only ones. Nevertheless, the few decades of development of this group of games (regardless of how popular and how large a group they are when it comes to the various kinds, subkinds and the numerous

2 Świtalski in 1987 proposed the name ‘symulogy’ (Pl. ‘*symulogia*’) for a discipline which would deal with simulations and simulation games (cf. Siek-Piskozub 1995:27).

3 Digital Arts and Culture conference, April 26-28, 2001, Providence, Rhode Island. All DiGRA publications are available online: <http://www.digra.org/dl> (23.07.2011).

4 Aki Järvinen’s weblog: <http://www.gameswithoutfrontiers.net> (23.07.2011).

5 <http://www.konzack.blogspot.com> (23.07.2011).

6 Obviously it does not mean that digital games are played only by children and teenagers – quite the contrary – this is an erroneous view which has functioned in society’s consciousness. Digital games stopped being ‘children’s toys’ many years ago.

titles themselves) cannot erase the thousands of years of existence and development of other games. It has to be admitted, however, that Frasca and other researchers to a large extent contributed to the popularisation of the name of the discipline (despite its hybrid nature). It is important that *ludology* (in English-speaking countries appearing interchangeably with *game studies* or *games research*), even if most often referring to digital games research, becomes a recognisable term and is more and more often cultivated. As a result there are more and more academic periodicals (mostly online, which incomparably increases their range and readership compared to traditional ones) devoted to digital games. Among the most popular ones there should be mentioned: "Game Journal: Professional Academic Forum for Games and Game Theory"<sup>7</sup>, "Game Studies: The International Journal of Computer Game Research"<sup>8</sup>, "Game Research: The Art, Business, and Science of Video Games"<sup>9</sup>, "Games and Culture: A Journal of Interactive Media"<sup>10</sup>, "Eludamos: Journal for Computer Game Culture"<sup>11</sup> and "Loading..."<sup>12</sup>. And in Poland – "Homo Ludens"<sup>13</sup>, which is the first and at present the only Polish ludological reviewed periodical; moreover, unlike the others, devoted not only to digital games. So far three issues have been published in the traditional and digital versions (1/2009, 1(2)/2010, 1(3)/2011).

## The status of ludology as an academic discipline

Unfortunately, contrary to Frasca's claim (2003) concerning ludology as the study of games in general and videogames in particular, the writings of the aforementioned scholars concentrate on computer game research exclusively or to a significant extent and their papers are read mainly at conferences typically organized by computer research associations such as *DiGRA*. The only exception to the current trend seems to be represented by Aki Järvinen whose doctoral dissertation "Games without Frontiers: Theories and Methods for Game Studies and Design" (2007) can indeed be called a milestone, or at least a solid starting point and a significant contribution to further discussion on ludological theory and

methodology, or, as the author calls it himself, applied ludology. However, Järvinen is, again, first of all, like the other scholars, a computer game designer and IT specialist, nevertheless, he managed to refer to different disciplines compiling a substantial interdisciplinary theoretical work which might be called a ludological one. However, in an effort to build the foundations of the area of ludology it is essential to take into consideration all kinds of games (including parlour games, board games, card games, computer/video/digital games, sports etc.) – to simplify matters the author of this article suggests a distinction into digital and non-digital games – with all their elements, aspects and contexts, otherwise any methodology thus created would not be reliable or useful. At the same time Frasca's statement that ludology must not be appropriated by any other existing discipline is absolutely correct.

*Polskie Towarzystwo Badania Gier* (Eng. *Games Research Association of Poland*) is more heterogeneous than *DiGRA*, even bewildering when it comes to the professions of its members. Among the members and guests of the association's annual conferences there are media experts, foreign language pedagogy experts, linguists, theorists of literature, historians, philosophers, cultural researchers, sociologists, psychologists and psychiatrists, pedagogues, computer experts, economy experts, lawyers, game authors, journalists and representatives of other disciplines, including the sciences.

*PTBG* [...] gathers scholars and students of numerous universities, different specializations [...] and professions, as well as practitioners – game players and game designers, dealing with broadly perceived game issues especially Role-Playing Games and computer games.

The aim of the association is to popularise and develop knowledge of games, both in theoretical (interdisciplinary, as well as from the point of view of particular disciplines) and practical (creating and distributing games; didactic applications) perspective. *Games Research Association of Poland* has an ambition for its members to establish valuable scholarly theoretical assumptions and introduce innovative practical solutions. The association organises – alone and through cooperation with academic institutions – meetings, conventions, conferences, workshops, courses, trainings and other enterprises related to games research.

Its intention is to popularise and publish ludological academic works written in Poland. *PTBG* propagates the idea of games as a form of creative use of time, intends to present proposals concerning application of games in didactics and pedagogy to the Ministry of Education and raises interest in games via different media including the internet. The association also takes a stand in public matters related to games. It is planning to cooperate with similar scientific/scholarly societies, organisations and institutions in Poland and abroad. ([www.ptbg.org.pl](http://www.ptbg.org.pl) 23.05.2011)

The idea binding scholars from so many disciplines is the common interest in researching broadly perceived games in numerous aspects, from many scientific perspectives and their application in education (including glottodidactics and distance learning/e-learning). Ludology as a science dealing with games research

7 <http://www.gamejournal.org> (23.07.2011).

8 <http://gamestudies.org> (23.07.2011).

9 <http://www.game-research.com> (23.07.2011).

10 <http://gac.sagepub.com> (23.07.2011).

11 <http://www.eludamos.org> (23.07.2011).

12 <http://journals.sfu.ca/loading/index.php/loading> (23.07.2011).

13 <http://ptbg.org.pl/HomoLudens/>. The list of four previous PTBG's publications is available at <http://ptbg.org.pl/strona.php?id=9>. Two of them (special editions of "Homo Communicativus") are available online: [www.hc.amu.edu.pl](http://www.hc.amu.edu.pl) (23.07.2011).

in human life is a young discipline, therefore it is relatively difficult to find scholars researching games as purely ludic phenomena, hence the interdisciplinarity of the association and integration of different academic circles. Above all, however, it must be emphasised that the dominant aims of *PTBG* specified in its statute lie in the educational sphere.

Ludology, in aspiring to become an independent academic discipline must fulfill – like any other discipline – specific, basic methodological conditions as even academic status does not automatically make a discipline a researchable one. These are: 1. a defined area of research, 2. defined aims of research 3. research methodology (cf. Pfeiffer 2001: 13-14). By the same token, the subject of ludological research should not be reducible to other disciplines. Like glottodidactics and many other contemporary disciplines it has an interdisciplinary character. Its interdisciplinarity is reflected by the multiplicity of disciplines represented by the members of *PTBG*. However, it goes beyond the interdisciplinarity of others as it results from the interrelation of frequently shared fields of study in the humanities, social sciences and sciences. In connection with this some basic questions arise: *Is it possible and necessary to create a separate methodology for game research?* and then *Can ludology grow out of theories worked out by the humanities and social sciences exclusively?* These questions have been proposed by the organizational committee of the *PTBG*'s cycle of annual conferences titled "Culture-generative function of games", and the aim of the cycle is, among others, an attempt to find answers to them and encourage further discussion.

In the case of ludology in the shape perceived by *PTBG* and its exceptional interdisciplinarity creating a common methodology for game research seems to be an extremely difficult task. A possible solution might be applying a deliberately flexible combination of a selection of methodologies conditioned by the aim, level and character of the research and adjusted to the subject of the research or, in specific cases, application of a compilation of methods borrowed from individual disciplines. Simultaneously, there should be specified and separated pure theories, realizing cognitive aims, and applied theories realizing pragmatic aims.

### Ludic strategy in foreign language didactics

The scope of research of ludology in foreign language didactics is limited to educational games which are basically divided into two groups (cf. Hadfield 1987): linguistic games (used to teach vocabulary) and communicative games (used to teach speaking and communication). Another distinction divides educa-

tional games into cooperative and competitive ones depending on the kind of involvement of the students. However, the sphere is large enough to form an area which has been of increasing interest to scholars in the last thirty years. Among them there are also Polish academics dealing with the practical and theoretical sides of this area. In addition to the cognitive, metacognitive and socio-affective strategies recognised in the methodology of teaching foreign languages Siek-Piskozub distinguished, researched and described another one and coined the term ludic strategy (Siek-Piskozub 1993, 1995, 2001) for it. It covers the use of techniques referring to the sphere of human ludic activities adjusted to and serving educational purposes. Among the ludic activities which find their application in foreign language didactics as ludic techniques there are: linguistic play, play involving physical movement, musical play, strategic games, games of strategy and chance, simulations (including various theatrical techniques), happenings, music and singing, which altogether significantly broadens the scope of ludological research in glottodidactics. Techniques result from the adopted strategy and have an instrumental character (cf. Siek-Piskozub 2007:17). On the basis of the research conducted personally and supervised by Siek-Piskozub it can be stated that ludic strategy can considerably assist the process of teaching/learning a foreign language and ludic techniques can be applied in every phase of a lesson, although different techniques serve different functions.

In the first phase of the lesson, which is its beginning (also called a 'linguistic warm up'), the techniques play a motivating role. They can help the teacher to gain the positive attitude of the students to the activities awaiting them and to establish contact with the students. The function of the warm up is very often underestimated by the teachers who prefer to begin the lesson with routines such as checking attendance or homework and by the same token losing the greatest potential of the students after a break of rest. Another value of ludic techniques used in the initial phase of a lesson is helping the students to switch from their mother tongue to the foreign language. Finally, in a heterogenic group of students (representing different types of learners), they can integrate the activities of the impulsive learners with the reflexive ones. Additionally, when based on the material introduced in the previous lessons, the techniques can play a checking function, although in a less formal way. After the warm up, during the actual game<sup>14</sup> when the students are involved in it, having been instructed in advance by the teacher about the rules and aim of the game, the teacher can be partly released from constant supervision and can spend some time on administrative-

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14 Especially advisable in this phase are linguistic games and play, e.g. riddles, crosswords, diagrams.

organisational duties<sup>15</sup>. This way the techniques can play an organisational function. Although the teacher does not have to be a direct participant in the activities certainly he should show interest in the result and the students' opinions. Only then will the activities be perceived by them as important for learning the foreign language and not only as useless entertainment or time fillers for the teacher to do 'more important duties'.

In another phase of the lesson distinguished by methodologists, which is the realisation of the main goal of the lesson, most often pre-communicative (cf. Littlewood 1994) and quasi-communicative activities can be used. In the former ones the students learn how to be oriented in using certain units of the language in communication, while in the latter ones the students use them in specific communication situations. Because of the dual goal of this phase, resulting from its didactic function (extracting the knowledge possessed by the students and introducing new units) it is possible to use various techniques<sup>16</sup>. The goal of another phase of the lesson is to consolidate and check the level of mastery of new linguistic units and to correct if necessary.<sup>17</sup> The teacher is only an observer helping pairs or larger groups of students to communicate. Mistakes are recorded and discussed later after finishing the communicative tasks. The students are given a problem to solve. Their openness in solving the problem releases the creativity of the students and provokes them to produce spontaneous utterances. The solution must be negotiated with the others which causes emotions and makes the situation more authentic. It should not be forgotten that the techniques recommended for this phase (music and simulations) apart from the didactic function undoubtedly also have a therapeutic function. The last phase of a lesson – the ending – is also a good opportunity to introduce a ludic technique<sup>18</sup>. Its purpose can be to make the students realize what they have learnt, to give them homework and instruct how to do it.

## Ludological research in the Institute of Applied Linguistics

The Institute of Applied Linguistics of The Faculty of Modern Languages and Literature of Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań (formerly The Department

of Glottodidactics and Translation Studies), can be proud of a long history of ludological research and academic activity in this area in teaching foreign languages. It was in the years 1987–1995 Teresa Siek-Piskozub (an unquestionable authority in the sphere of ludic strategy) wrote her postdoctoral dissertation titled "Gry, zabawy i symulacje w procesie glottodydaktycznym" (Siek-Piskozub 1995). The book became an inspiration for creating in the academic year 1999/2000 *Postgraduate Studies of Glottodidactics* addressed to teachers of German, within which two glottodidactic meetings were organised, both completed with publications (cf. Prokop 2001; Hostyński 2003). Soon after studies began at post graduate level, obligatory subjects discussing ludology and ludic strategy phenomena were incorporated into the B.A. and M.A. programmes of philology-applied linguistics courses (e.g. "Fringe methods" – lectures and exercises in extramural M.A. studies), in which among other things general ludology and ludic strategy phenomena are discussed. There are also optional classes offered, presenting theoretically and practically the applications of the Technique of Role-playing Games (cf. Surdyk 2003, 2006) and educational computer and online games. Besides, it was in the Institute of Applied Linguistics where the first scholarly circle of *PTBG* was created, and the institute has been a co-organiser of the association's conferences cycle titled "Culture-generative Function of Games"<sup>19</sup> since its beginning i.e. 2005, an international workshop<sup>20</sup>, and numerous guest lectures and workshops for workers and students have been organised. Finally, in 2009, on a motion put forward by the author of the present article, the *Center for Ludological Research in Glottodidactics and Intercultural Communication* was founded. Its workers deal with ludological research collaboratively or individually, in their doctoral and postdoctoral dissertations and in didactics (in practical language classes, B.A. and M.A. seminars and other philological subjects). They are interested especially in the area of ludic strategy within the title field of research<sup>21</sup> as well as in broadly perceived ludology as game research. The center cooperates with *PTBG* and among its workers there are members-founders, members of *PTBG*, members of Advisory Board of "Homo Ludens" and regular guests of the association's annual international aca-

15 Egg checking attendance, writing the subject of the lesson, checking homework etc.

16 Usually when the emphasis is on communication this is role-play in pairs based on a given scenario but if vocabulary is the main focus of the phase they can be also linguistic games or songs, e.g. filling gaps in the lyrics.

17 Simulations are perceived to be an especially useful technique in this phase.

18 Usually the ones which do not require specific timing, e.g. singing a song the students have learnt or listening to a new one to be introduced in the future.

19 Pl. "Kulturotwórcza funkcja gier". So far seven conferences have been organised and a two-volume publication containing papers read at the first conference published, more details available at: [www.gry.konferencja.org](http://www.gry.konferencja.org) and <http://www.gry.konferencja.org/page.php?id=3319> (23.07.2011).

20 In 2007, on "Educational games in prevention of infectious diseases" with guests from Health Education Department of Ashanti Regional Health Promotion Centre (Department of Ministry of Health) from Ghana, Africa.

21 E.g. didactic games, communication/linguistic games and other ludic techniques in teaching foreign languages and intercultural communication.

demic conferences. Beginning with the academic year 2009/2010 there have been introduced two post-graduate mastering courses for foreign language teachers: "Constructing educational games in teaching foreign languages" and "New technologies in teaching foreign languages" which will be conducted by specialists from *PTBG*.

To conclude, bearing in mind that ludology is a young and continuously forming discipline but glottodidactics, despite a few decades of its formal existence, is still unfortunately often underestimated, generalised and diminished to linguistics or, at the most, applied linguistics, perhaps both paving their way to being widely accepted and respected, through mutual support and cooperation, one day will lead to the birth of another solid common field of research – ludological intercultural glottopedagogy. For the time being *PTBG* together with the *Center for Ludological Research in Glottodidactics and Intercultural Communication* are preparing another (8<sup>th</sup>) annual conference in Poznań (November 2012) on the cycle entitled "The Ludologist at University and Beyond" and the members of the editorial board are working on another issue of "Homo Ludens" (1[4]/2012).

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